

CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

Tuesday, October 16, 2018
Area Agency on Aging building, 524 Garrison Avenue
Fort Smith, Arkansas
7th Floor Board Room

Meeting Minutes

The Fort Smith Central Business Improvement District Commission's regular meeting was scheduled for 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, October 16, 2018 in the 7th floor board room of the Area Agency on Aging building, 524 Garrison Avenue, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Bill Hanna, Chairperson, at 9:30 a.m. and a quorum was noted present. Also in attendance were commissioners Steve Clark, Lee Ann Vick, Rodney Ghan, Phil White, Sam Sicard and Jeff Pryor. Commissioner Richard Griffin was absent and excused. Others in attendance included Brenda Andrews, Doug Reinert and Jeff Dingman of the City of Fort Smith.

Mr. Ghan moved approval of the minutes of the September 18, 2018 regular meeting. Mr. Clark seconded, and the motion carried by unanimous vote.

Mr. Sicard reviewed the Treasurer's report for the month of September 2018, such documents being previously provided by Mr. Sicard for the commissioners' review. As of September 30, 2018, the Total Cash-on-Hand for the CBID amounted to \$74,703.62. Restricted funds comprise \$5,439.90 of the total cash. The total cash net of restricted funds is \$69,263.72. Mr. Sicard asked Mr. White about the operating expenses regarding the Park at West End for 2017. Mr. White asked that item be placed on a future meeting agenda for discussion. Mr. White then moved approval of the Treasurer's report. Mr. Pryor seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Hanna introduced Talicia Richardson, Executive Director of 64.6 Downtown, for an update on activities. Mrs. Richardson introduced Mr. John McIntosh to assist. The two reported that The Unexpected Project is set for its fourth installment, which will occur the week of October 22-28. Detailed information regarding the artists involved and the location of their works for this year's event was distributed. Of note is the collaboration between The Unexpected Project and Crystal Bridges museum to promote the event, particularly the Yatika Fields Bastion Gallery installment at 918 Garrison Avenue. The event will include several properties along Towson Avenue, including several properties in the 200 block of Towson as one unique installment. In conjunction with The Unexpected this year is "The Outlier" series of musical acts that will perform at various venues downtown on October 26 & 27. Also planned is a panelist Q&A session with at least two of the muralists, and a presentation/talk by Thomas Frey, a "Futurist" offering perspectives on examining and planning for the future. These events will be held at 1100 Garrison on October 26 & 27, although a free ticket is required due to limited space. The Futurist discussion is being sponsored by Talk Business & Politics.

Mr. White noted that the Ana Maria installment this year at the 800 block of Garrison Avenue is intended to cover the existing Ana Maria mural on the Kress building's protective plywood facade. Mr. White & Mr. Ghan suggested that they replace the existing plywood on the building with a new surface, so that the original mural can be dismantled, retained, stored, and potentially repurposed at another location. Mr. McIntosh agreed that could be done, if the new surface could be in place within the next five days so that it is ready for the new mural. Mr. Ghan and Mr. White said they would make that happen.

64.6 Downtown is hosting an “Invest Fort Smith” moderated summit the afternoon of Tuesday, October 30 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mrs. Richardson noted that Rex Nelson and Roby Brock have agreed to moderate different panel discussions at the event. CBID members, as well as other downtown property owners, are invited to attend and hear discussions about challenges and opportunities related to property management, landlord/tenant issues, construction/rehabilitation, and collaborative approaches to marketing downtown properties. Invitations will be sent regionally, and tickets for the event are \$25, which includes lunch.

Mr. Sicard announced that the Grand Opening celebration of the Riverfront Skate & Bike Park was postponed from October 13 due to weather. The new date is October 27, the event will start at 11 a.m., with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 11:30, and events through the afternoon and evening.

The commission reviewed the Neighborhood Services report for the CBID, noting that several new items have been included. Ms. Andrews reported that the Neighborhood Services staff visited with 64/6 Downtown representatives about the types of enforcement and property maintenance that can be done, and several verbal courtesy notices were given to property owners, much of which can be easily rectified so that the report is much shorter in the future. Mrs. Richardson noted that the demands on the city’s Neighborhood Services inspectors are many, and that those interested in downtown need to help bring items to the attention of property owners and the city on a regular basis. The visit with city staff also helped define what is actually enforceable through the city’s property maintenance code and what is not.

Doug Reinert, the city’s Director of Parks & Recreation, presented an update on city projects. There was a ribbon cutting October 10 at Fort Smith Park for several projects, including the third phase of the Greg Smith River Trail, the Fishing Pavilion/Parking Lot, a new inclusive playground structure, and a dog park. Those projects are complete. He again noted the ribbon-cutting & opening for the Skate & Bike Park on October 27, and Bobby Aldridge of Frontier Engineering added that the park is substantially complete, with some landscaping and a few minor punch list items to fix before completion. The park is already being used by all ages, either participating in the bike/skate amenities or watching. There has been some issue with the red clay from the bicycle track being tracked onto the skatepark area, and Mr. Hanna asked about volunteer efforts to help maintain that. Mr. Aldridge replied that there is already an effort seeking volunteers to help with this type of ongoing maintenance to keep the park in good order.

Mr. White asked about the benches being removed from the downtown in recent weeks. Mr. Dingman replied that City Administration has directed the benches be removed temporarily in response to complaints from business owners of people sleeping on benches and littering in the area of the benches, thereby detracting from their businesses. Mr. Dingman noted that the move is intended to be temporary, and that the benches should return in the next few months. Mr. White specifically inquired about the benches donated for purpose of the Farmers Market in the North 2nd Street lot, to which Mr. Dingman replied that the benches are owned by the city and placed on city property, and are included in the overall evaluation of impact of homeless persons appropriating them for sleeping to the exclusion of other members of the public and to the detriment of downtown businesses. Mr. Dingman noted that there is significant interest on both sides of this discussion and reiterated that Administration does intend for the benches to be reinstalled. The CBID asked about the potential for increased policing, to which Bobby Aldridge noted that the FSPD has noticeably improved its presence with business owners downtown recently, perhaps in response to the closing of South Camp and removal of the benches.

The CBID considered a variance request for a project at 709 Rogers Avenue, presented by Childers Architects on behalf of the property’s new owner. The owner recently purchased both 705 & 709 Rogers and is putting forth a development plan for a coffee bar at 709 Rogers. The facility would have a balcony on the second floor overlooking the sidewalk, two floors of seating inside, and an open-air courtyard at the rear. The variance sought is the opening of the front façade to accommodate the second floor balcony

(demolition of part of the brick structure), and the painting of the brick with a suggested color palette. Several commissioners noted support for the investment in this property, and that the suggested changes were appealing. Mr. Sicard moved approval of the variances for this project. Mr. Clark seconded, and the motion carried by unanimous vote. The architect was asked about the timing of the proposed improvement and replied that the owner is ready to proceed as soon as all authorizations and permits are secured. He was also asked about the owner's intentions on the 705 Rogers building and replied that they are currently focused on 709, but the owner has expressed interest in updating and using 705 as well.

The CBID next heard a proposal from the owner of the 5th Street Café located at 5th and Garrison to paint a sign on the exterior wall of the brick building. The proposed sign is a white-painted sign referring to the Fort Smith Brewing Company, with whom 5th Street Café has an arrangement to tap several of that company's products in its business. Ms. Andrews noted that the intended sign would need to be revisited, as it represented an off-premises advertisement of Fort Smith Brewing Co., which falls into the category of billboards and is prohibited in the downtown by city ordinance. The CBID supported the concept of the painted sign so long as the language on the sign is appropriate and it is not an off-premise advertisement in violation of the ordinance. No action was taken.

Jim Spears addressed the CBID on behalf of the effort to raise funding for the creation of Gateway Park at the confluence of Garrison & Rogers Avenues at the eastern edge of downtown. Mr. Spears shared mock-ups of the three statues to be included in the park, as well as an updated rendering of the park's layout. Mr. Spears is heading up the fundraising campaign to raise the funds needed to pay for the statues and asked that the CBID consider a contribution to the effort of \$15,000. Mr. White moved that the CBID contribute \$15,000 to the Gateway Park project. Mr. Ghan seconded, and the motion carried by unanimous vote.

Mr. Clark asked Mr. Reinert about the status of landscaping downtown. Mr. Reinert reported that he and his staff are devising a plan in coordination with several interested parties to replace the roses with other flowers and address trees and other landscaping needs downtown. More information on that plan will be provided when it is finalized.

The next meeting of the CBID Commission is the strategic planning session on Thursday, November 8, which will be held at The Bakery building at 63 South 6th Street. The regular November meeting is scheduled for November 20. There being no additional business before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at approximately 10:44 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Dingman
Deputy City Administrator